

Cyclophonica in the USA - 2002

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Bike Band Pedals to Play Music

By DAVID DISHNEAU, Associated Press Writer

FROSTBURG, Md. (AP) - The music goes 'round and 'round and comes out weird when Leonardo Fuks puts his bicycle band in motion.

Fuks is a professor of music and acoustics at the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He led the first U.S. performance on Friday of Cyclophonica, a nine-piece group that pedals as it plays.

Their durable instruments are homemade from plastic bottles and PVC pipes, or store-bought and modified to be worn by riders or attached to bikes for one-handed or no-handed playing.

Bird calls, trombones, flutes and tin cans all play parts in compositions both fanciful and classical.

"'Bolero' is usually a hit because it is so cyclic," said Fuks, whose name rhymes with "kooks". Except for Fuks, the group was composed of Frostburg State University students and faculty members who performed on the campus of Frostburg State after just four rehearsals. Fuks, riding a battered blue Schwinn cruiser, led them through a 20-minute concert.

Circling a landmark clock tower before two dozen spectators, they also performed arrangements of "The (Bike) Ride of the Valkyries" and "Frere Jacques."

Fuks came to Frostburg at the invitation of George Plitnik, a physics professor who has known Fuks since 1993.

The group's sound can be cacophonous and its appearance is absurd; some riders have cymbals stuck to the tops of their mandatory helmets.

But the project has a serious side, rooted in the paucity of musical education in Brazil.

"You have to have some extra money to pay for classes there. The public schools, unfortunately, usually don't provide any musical education and it's even worse for having access to instruments," Fuks said.

Bicycles, on the other hand, are plentiful and relatively cheap.

"We want to make it so that music-making can be as simple as riding a bike. At the same time, riding a bike should be as conscious and artistic, in some way, as making music."

The project also has led to the creation of musical instruments that could be played by people with limited use of their hands, he said.

Fuks, 40, a classically trained oboe player, loves bicycle riding. He conceived Cyclophonica about five years ago while biking around Stockholm, Sweden, between his Ph.D. work at the Royal Institute of Technology and his rehearsals and performances with the Nacka Symphony Orchestra.

He said he experimented with riding while playing an oboe, trumpet, saxophone and whistle and had little trouble, although the simpler instruments were obviously easier.

"I realized it was a really pleasant activity to play on the bike, and it didn't require any special skill. It seems that when we are biking, we have complete musical independence," Fuks said.

Fuks and his group have become fairly well known in Brazil, where they have performed about 20 times since 1999, he said.

The professor returns to teaching duties there next week, but said he hoped to perform in the United States again.